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Kőrösmező: The First Deportation of the Hungarian Holocaust, 1941

However soothing it may be, the widely held view that the Hungarian Holocaust began after German occupation in the spring of 1944 is simply incorrect. In July and August of 1941, Jews living in Hungary were transported by train to a concentration camp near the city of Kőrösmező (Kamianets-Podilskyi, today Yasina in the Ukraine) and then on trucks to empty roadside fields near Ukrainian villages in occupied Poland. Less than three years later, in May, June, and July of 1944, Jews living in Hungary were transported by train to Auschwitz, also in occupied Poland. While there are significant differences between the deportations of 1941 and 1944, they are linked by two essential facts: in both instances they were carried out by the Hungarian police and the gendarmerie acting on decisions of the Hungarian government, members of which could have been quite certain about the impending fate of the victims had they cared to know¹, and in both instances the victims were deported and the vast majority of them killed specifically because they were Jewish.

Perhaps the simplest difference between the two deportations is one of numbers. Just under 20,000 people were sent to their deaths in 1941 (19,426 according to a police report). This is a large number, even when one is

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1 ■ The disinterest of the government was eloquently summarized at a meeting of the Hungarian government on the question of deportations on 24 June, 1944. According to the official record the minister of internal affairs Andor Jaross said: "In the end we are not interested where the Jews are going. The interest of the country is that the Jews be removed quickly." Jegyzőkönyve az 1944. évi június hó 24-én Budapesten tartott rendkívüli Minisztertanácsnak. See: Minisztertanácsi jegyzőkönyvek, 24 June, 1944 at <www.digitarchiv.hu>.

speaking of genocide, yet it may well have come to seem small in comparison by May, June, and July of 1944, when the Hungarian authorities oversaw the deportation of some 437,000 people. This difference, however, is merely one of quantity. In contrast, a qualitative difference is that in 1941 the deportations were not carried out at German request. On the contrary, in the end of July, 1941, the German military commanders even pleaded with the Hungarian government to stop deporting undesired civilians to the occupied zone, where food was scarce and they constituted a health risk to ongoing military operations. According to a parliamentary speech held on 21 November by László Bárdossy, the Hungarian Prime Minister at the time, it was German intervention that prompted the Hungarian authorities to end the deportations on 12 August. Responding to members urging him to do more on the Jewish question, he said, “after the occupation of Ukrainian territories, we deported significant numbers of Jews of Galician origin. We intended to relocate more of them, but our friend, the German empire, warned us not to continue. We certainly had to bow to this demand.”²

In its initial rejections of the German request to bring the deportations to a halt, the Hungarian government claimed that the policy was directed against recently arrived immigrants from the east who were being repatriated. This constituted an acceptable pretext and it served to appease the consciences of more moderate members of the Hungarian government and others who learned of the deportation, which was to be kept secret by the press. However, not all of the victims were immigrants from Poland or the Soviet Union. Indeed they probably constituted a small minority. Some of them in fact had come from the opposite direction, from Austria, where after the Anschluss in 1938 the authorities had tried to force Jews to emigrate, which many of them had done, fleeing in any possible direction.

But crucially, the notion that the victims of the Körösmező deportation were non-Hungarian immigrants of Galician origin—a contention implicitly voiced by historian Sándor Szakály, who caused outrage in early 2014 by calling the deportation a police action against aliens,³ and found in many works on history (even in a brief summary of the Hungarian Holocaust on the Yad Vashem

2 ■ Az országgyűlés képviselőházának 223. ülése 1941. évi november hó 21-én, pénteken. In: *Az 1939. évi június hó 10-re hirdetett Országgyűlés képviselőházának naplója*. Tizenegyedik kötet. Athenaeum, Budapest, 1941. 537. See the searchable database of the parliamentary sessions from the XI. volume: <http://www3.arcanum.hu/onap/a110616.htm?v=pdf&a=pdfdata&id=KN-1939_11&pg=0&l=hun> Last accessed: 7 May, 2014.

3 ■ Szakály said this in an interview to the MTI news agency that was quoted on 17 January, 2014 by major Hungarian news outlets, see for example: <http://index.hu/belfold/2014/01/17/idegenrendeszeti_problema_a_zsidok_deportalasa/> and: <<http://www.origo.hu/itthon/20140117-idegenrendeszeti-eljaras-volt-a-zsidok-deportalasa-kamenyec-podolszkba.html>> He later apologized to anyone offended saying he may have been wrong.

portal⁴)—is simply not correct. The wording of the official resolution of the Hungarian Ministry for Home Affairs, dated 12 July, 1941, refers to non-Hungarian citizens:

Considering the current foreign policy circumstances, the opportunity has arisen soon to remove from the territory of the country unsuitable foreigners [...] and foreign citizens against whom legally binding decisions regarding expulsion or the rejection of permission to reside have not yet been effectively implemented.⁵

Strictly confidential resolutions of the coming days detailing the required execution of the original resolution, all signed by Sándor Siménfalvy, counselor of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and leader of the National Central Authority for Controlling Foreigners (Külföldieket Ellenőrző Országos Központi Hatóság, KEOKH), further specify who was to be apprehended by the police: "Polish and Russian Jews who have recently infiltrated the country."⁶ Nevertheless, the instructions were still far from clear, as one of the resolutions dated 30 July, 1941 demonstrates:

Referring to my earlier resolutions... about the removal of foreign Jews I call upon the police offices of the highest order to remove only those foreigners of the Jewish race whose Polish or Russian origin can be rendered probable either by earlier obtained data or examinations to be made in the future [...] Their removal is to be executed immediately.⁷

In practice, the police and the gendarmerie apprehended Jews who could not immediately prove their Hungarian citizenship. In Carpatho-Ukraine, parts of villages the inhabitants of which were Jewish were sometimes emptied completely, a telltale sign that the authorities were not simply looking for recently arrived refugees. Indeed, the deportations were not a matter of removing "foreign" elements, but as Timothy Snyder has observed, rather a clear instance of ethnic cleansing of a recently occupied territory. "Hungary," he writes, "a German ally, had been allowed to annex subcarpathian Ruthenia [i. e. Carpatho-Ukraine], the far eastern district of Czechoslovakia. Rather than grant the native Jews of this region Hungarian citizenship, Hungary expelled 'stateless' Jews to the east, to German-occupied Ukraine."⁸ It must be noted

4 ■ "When Hungary joined the war against the Allies, nearly 20,000 Jews from Kamenetz-Podolsk who held Polish or Soviet citizenship were turned over to the Germans and murdered." <<http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/holocaust/about/09/hungary.asp>> Last accessed on 6 May, 2014.

5 ■ The document is available here: <http://www.holokausztmagyarorszagon.hu/index.php?section=1&chapter=2_2_3&type=doc>.

6 ■ Cited in Braham 1997, 199-202.

7 ■ Zoltán Szirtes: *Temetetlen halottaink. 1941. Kőrösmező, Kamenyec-Podolszk*. Szirtes Z., Budapest, 1996, 15.

8 ■ Timothy Snyder. *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*. Basic Books (October 2, 2012). 61.

however that the operation affected not only Carpatho-Ukraine, even if the majority of the deportees were indeed from this region.

Proving one's citizenship was far from simple at a time when people were not carrying identification cards in their pockets. This was especially problematic in Carpatho-Ukraine (essentially the western region of what today is the Ukraine), which had been part of Czechoslovakia and had only fallen under the control of the Hungarian authorities in 1939. Indeed it was almost impossible, as the third paragraph of the so-called second anti-Jewish law (1939/IV) explicitly excluded Jews from obtaining Hungarian citizenship through naturalization, marriage or legalization. (The law even entitled the Minister of Internal Affairs in certain loosely defined cases to revoke the citizenship of Jews who had acquired citizenship after 1 July, 1914.)⁹ This meant that anyone who could not prove that he or she had been a citizen in Hungary before the First World War (when Carpatho-Ukraine had been part of the Hungarian Kingdom) was in immediate danger.

But sometimes even documents could not help. According to the contention of a local Jewish leader of Huszt county, the chief administrative officer there requested that all Jews submit whatever documents they had, which they did in the hope that they would obtain certification of their citizenship. Instead, when deportations began and they stormed the office in panic in order to be given back the original documents, the officer "did not have the time to handle their request," so they were taken away empty-handed. This is just one of the many abuses recorded in the travel report of a group led by Margit Slachta, the founder of the Roman Catholic Sisters of Social Service (which included some liberal-minded Hungarian aristocrats), which traveled to the Eastern frontier of Hungary, to verify reports of the brutality of the deportations.¹⁰ The report also describes the group's meeting with police chief Arisztid Meskó, supervisor of the deportations in Carpatho-Ukraine, who explained that he found it appropriate to apprehend families by surprise at night in order to catch everyone, that six months earlier he had ordered Jews to obtain, if they could, proof of citizenship

9 ■ See for example: *Magyarországi zsidótörvények és rendeletek. 1938–1945* [Hungarian Jewish Laws and Decrees. 1938–1945]. (Összeállította: Vértés Róbert). Polgár Kiadó, Budapest, 1997, 47.

10 ■ Gróf Apponyi György, Slachta Margit, Dr. Szabó Imre és Gróf Szapáry Erzsébet úti beszámolója a kárpátaljai deportálás körülményeiről, Budapest, 1941. augusztus 20 [Travel Report of Count György Apponyi, Margit Slachta, Dr Imre Szabó and Countess Erzsébet Szapáry on the Circumstances of the Kárpátalja Deportation, Budapest, 20 August, 1941]. The document is published in: Majsai Tamás: *Iratok a kőrösmezei zsidódeportálás történetéhez. 1941* [Documents on the History of the Deportation of Jews to Kőrösmező. 1941]. In: Ráday Gyűjtemény Évkönyve IV-V. (1984–1985) (ed. Kálmán Benda, Angéla Beliczay, György Erdős, Edit Nagy, Julianna Szabó.), Dunamelléki Református Egyházkerület, Budapest, 1986, 224. The travel report can also be found in an updated online version of Majsai's article here (without page numbers): <http://www.korosmezo1941.netai.net/files/Korosmezo_dokumentumok.pdf>. Last accessed: 6 May, 2014

from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, but the Jews had knowingly “sabotaged” (“tudatosan szabotálták”) his efforts because at that time they had thought that they could not be removed anywhere, and that “he is not interested in personal tragedies.”¹¹ Not only did the deportations specifically target Jews (not newly arrived immigrants), the mother tongue of many of the deportees was Hungarian. Slachta and her fellow travelers were not allowed to enter the detention camps or cross the border to follow the deportees, but they nevertheless came into contact with deportees through the fences of the concentration camp at Kőrösmező. “We talked to many,” she wrote, “but we came across no one who even by chance could have been mistaken as having come from Galicia or Russia.”¹² Instead, among the deportees “we have seen people holding their citizenship documents in their hands, a one-handed war cripple, an old man who could barely shuffle along, a little child with measles who, after the two-day journey, was waiting for hours with a mass of people on an open truck in the rain to be transported further.”¹³

Letters written in Hungarian by the desperate deportees and sent back from the Ukraine to Hungarian relatives offer further testimony to the fact that many of the deportees were, at least by native tongue, Hungarians. In 1986, these letters, together with other documents such as the abovementioned travel report or a desperate plea for help to feed 2,300 Jews from Hungary written in German by the Judenrat (Jewish Council) of Stanislaw on 28 August, 1941, were published along with a detailed study¹⁴ by Tamás Majsai, a theologian and historian. “Dear Rezső,” writes one of the deportees, “we have gone through suffering that cannot be imagined in Budapest. Had I known just five percent of it I don’t know what I would have done.... We are starving, and if nothing changes we are going to die because we have no food. There are fifty to sixty corpses floating down the Dnester [River] daily, they buried fifty here yesterday.” Another deportee emphasized his Hungarian identity: “It is as if the world had turned upside down, people have become so barbarous. [...] My Little Szidi, don’t be sad that I wrote all this, but I needed to lighten my soul, and maybe this could be reported to a higher forum, so that they don’t let someone, born in Budapest and Hungarian in feeling, perish.” Another deportee made a similar plea: “Mother, please compose an appeal in good Hungarian in my name. Write that father was born in Hungary, that you

11 ■ Travel report... in Majsai, *Iratok...* [see above], 225-226. Meskó also said that the operation was not conducted on the resolution of the minister of internal affairs in Carpatho-Ukraine, where it had no legal effect, but on a resolution drafted by him and given out by the governor, Miklós Kozma.

12 ■ Travel report... in Majsai, *Iratok...*, 222.

13 ■ Letter of Margit Slachta to Mrs. Miklós Horthy [Slachta Margit levele Horthy Miklósnénak] 13 August, 1941. In: Majsai, *Iratok...* 217

14 ■ Majsai, *Iratok...* 59-86.

stayed behind, but write it in good Hungarian as if I were writing it. Send it here, and I shall send it by post to Horthy.”

In addition, there are more than a dozen testimonies in perfect Hungarian by people who were deported in 1941 but somehow managed to sneak back. They are held at the archive of the National Committee to Care for the Deportees (Deportáltakat Gondozó Országos Bizottság, Degob), an organization that was set up immediately after the war to help the displaced and to document their accounts.¹⁵ In 2011, I myself spoke to one of the few people to survive the deportation, a man named László Zobel. He was ninety-three years-old at the time, clear of mind, and he remembered the events preceding the deportation of a group from Budapest in the summer of 1941 vividly: “At the detention center in Rumbach Sebestyén Street, I was made the clerk, I had to write down the names of those who were being brought in. There were about 200 of them, men, women, children, elderly. They all spoke Hungarian.”

There is a tragic irony to the fact that in the Carpatho-Ukraine, as in Northern Transylvania or the southern part of former Czechoslovakia, Jews whose native language was Hungarian (roughly one-fourth of the 116,000 Jews) were registered as Hungarian in the national census in early 1941 in order to inflate that number. Later, in the course of the war, when the statistics had already been published, these people were no longer regarded as Hungarians or for that matter desirable.

And yet, even if not Galician refugees, at least in Budapest the victims were not selected at random. I have looked at the stories of a number of victims and talked to relatives of some of them. They all seem to have had someone in the family who was born in Galicia decades before the deportation of 1941, usually before the First World War, when both Galicia and Hungary had been part of the same empire, Austria-Hungary. Children of men who had moved to Hungary before World War I or in the interwar period, children who indeed had been born in Hungary, like Zobel, were deported, as were their wives (usually women who had several generations of Hungarian ancestors) and on several occasions their children, who in 1941 were still very young. This suggests that KEOKH had an initial list of Jews who had been born in Galicia even before the First World War and of their descendants and spouses, and the authorities came to apprehend them all, irrespective of place of birth, residence, or mother tongue.

Once gathered together by the authorities, the deportees had sometimes only a few hours or less to collect their belongings. The deportations were done rapidly, and absent family members sometimes arrived home to discover their dwellings empty and never again to see their closest relatives. The deportees were sometimes tricked by the authorities into believing that

15 ■ A searchable online database of more than 3500 records can be found at www.degob.hu.

Eastern Poland they would be able to find work and lodging in houses that had been lived in by people who had fled eastward with the Soviet army. It was the same lie of emptied houses and opportunities for agricultural work, propagated by the top echelon of the army, notably defense minister Károly Bartha and chief of staff Henrik Werth, which initially helped convince hesitant members of the Hungarian government about the whole operation.¹⁶ The desperate messages of the deportees illustrate clearly that there were no such opportunities. Members of the Hungarian government could have discovered this. Margit Slachta did not have a chance to get firsthand information regarding the situation on the other side of the border, yet she knew enough about the deportees' chances of survival in the occupied zone: "in the best case scenario they are going to be beaten to death at once by Ukrainian peasants, in the worst case scenario they are going to starve to death in slow and painful suffering."¹⁷ This was indeed the fate of many of the deportees, but most of them were killed in the mass executions committed by German police and SS units, something Margit Slachta could not have foreseen.

After having been on the run for weeks, terrorized by unfriendly locals, and robbed of their best cloths or having had to exchange them for food, most of the deported Jews from Hungary ended up in the ghettos of major towns, like Kamianets-Podilskyi. Hungarian soldiers described what they had seen during their journey from Horodenka to Kamianets-Podilskyi on 18 August:

The civilian population is penniless poor, dirty and hungry. There are lots of Jews, especially women, in rags but also wearing jewelry and with lips painted red. They for bread in Hungarian and they are ready to pay any price for it. Some count their steps with visible final desperation on their faces, others writhe on the road, having collapsed in exhaustion and hunger. Others cover the wounds on their legs with pieces of cloth torn from their clothing. Little children cry and collapse in fatigue.¹⁸

And the scene in Kamianets-Podilskyi the next day:

The Jewish quarter of the ghetto is full of interned Jews, many of them from Budapest. They live in indescribable filth, they move around in inadequate clothing, the streets stink, there are unburied corpses stinking in some of the houses. The water of the Dnester [River] is infected, human corpses lie on the banks here and there.¹⁹

16 ■ This conclusion, based mainly on post-war testimonies of leading government officials, was drawn by Ádám and János Gellért. See: Az 1941. évi kőrösmezői deportálások. A kitoloncolásokat jóváhagyó minisztertanácsi döntés háttere. 2012/2 [The 1941 Kőrösmező Deportations. The Background of the Decision of the Council of Ministers Regarding the Expulsions. An Overview]. <http://betekinto.hu/sites/default/files/2012_2_gellert_gellert.pdf>.

17 ■ Majsai, *Iratok...*, 226.

18 ■ Krisztián Ungváry (ed.): A második világháború. Budapest, 2005, Osiris. 177.

19 ■ Ibid., 178.

Aware of the situation, on 25 August German military leaders accepted the offer made by SS-commander Friedrich Jeckeln, who pledged to execute the Jews by 1 September.²⁰

On 27-29 August, altogether 23,600 people, men, women, and children (about half of whom were from Hungary), were escorted out of the city. Rumors had been spread beforehand that they were going to be relocated, and so they were allowed to carry belongings.²¹ The testimony given by Karl Raddatz, a German policeman, offers a description brutal in its details of what actually happened:

The victims were forced to run through a line of guards made up of regular police from Police Battalion 320, the so-called 'hosepipe', to the craters; there they had to throw their possessions to one side, and some were also ordered to disrobe. Finally, they were compelled to climb down into the crater, lie down on top of the bodies of those who had already been murdered, and were then killed instantaneously by a shot to the base of the skull. 'Forbearance' was only shown for the riflemen: if any marksman was unable (or no longer able) to kill small children, he could ask to be relieved, drink some schnapps, take a break, and then return if possible to resume work at the pit.²²

The testimony of Hermann K., part of the SS force in the region, provides a similar account:

In the large execution at the end of August 1941 in Kamenets-Podolsk I took part... In total I was shooting there for one or two hours. Then we were relieved by a police detachment. If I'm asked how many Jews I shot, I cannot tell exactly. Maybe fifty or one-hundred. I don't know.²³

The liquidation of the Kamianets-Podilskyi ghetto was the largest massacre at the time and an important milestone in the history of the Holocaust. It was

20 ■ Massimo Arico: "Seht euch diesen Mann an." Kamenec Podolski 27-29 August 1941, 5. <<http://www.scribd.com/doc/18282882/Seht-euch-diesen-Mann-an-Kamenec-Podolski-2729-August-1941>>.

21 ■ Massimo Arico: "Seht euch..." 7. On the same page and on page 4 the essay also includes photos taken by Gyula Spitz, a Hungarian Jewish truck driver, of the column of people driven out of the city to their deaths.

22 ■ Testimony of Karl Raddatz, given on 11 November, 1960. Bundesarchiv Aussenstelle Ludwigsburg (German Federal Archives, Ludwigsburg Branch). Formerly Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen zur Aufklärung nationalsozialistischer Verbrechen (Central Office of the [Federal] State Justice Administrations for the Investigation of National Socialist Crimes), 204 AR-Z 48/58, Vol. 23, 3774-77. Cited in Andrej Angrick, "The Escalation of German-Romanian Anti-Jewish Policy after the Attack on the Soviet Union, June 22, 1941." *Yad Vashem Studies* 16 (1996): 203-38. 24-5.

23 ■ Bundesarchiv Aussenstelle Ludwigsburg (German Federal Archives, Ludwigsburg Branch). 204 AR-Z 13/60, Vol. 1, 403-404. Cited in *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht. Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941-1944. Ausstellungskatalog*. 135. Translated into English by Roberto Muehlenkamp. <http://holocaustcontroversies.blogspot.hu/2013/02/the-kamenets-podolsky-massacre_12.html>. Accessed on 1 May, 2014.

the first mass-murder of over ten thousand people. It was followed by a similar killing spree at the Babi Yar ravine near Kiev a month later, and then by a massacre on 30 November in the Rumbula forest near Riga (the hometown of Jeckeln). But the Kamianets-Podilskyi massacre was a milestone also in that it set a new pattern for international mass murder in death camps. Jews from one country were killed on the territory of another by gunmen of a third. It should certainly be noted that alongside Hungary, Romania also attempted to deport Jews from its recently occupied territories (roughly what is Moldova today) to the same area at roughly the same time, but the Germans hampered their efforts by blocking the bridges at the Southern flow of the Dnester River.²⁴ The events surrounding the Kőrösmező deportation were known to historians immediately after the Second World War. They were mentioned, admittedly in an endnote, in a widely read (at least in Hungary) essay by István Bibó entitled "A zsidókérdés Magyarországon 1944 után" ("The Jewish Question in Hungary after 1944"),²⁵ an honest account and a starting point for future reconciliation. In the early postwar accounts of the tragic episode of Kamianets-Podilskyi authors frequently mention a Hungarian unit that allegedly also participated in the killing spree, but these contentions have been proven false by the post-war testimonies of members of the German SS and police units. There were indications that the German police even tried to keep Hungarian forces away from the massacres so that they wouldn't obstruct the liquidations. On the other hand, the Hungarian government made every effort even after the Kamianets-Podilskyi massacre to fortify the "defense" of the border in order to hamper the attempts of survivors still in the region to sneak back into Hungary.²⁶

In the later decades of state socialism, accounts of the Kőrösmező deportation and the Kamianets-Podilskyi massacre disappeared completely from mainstream historiography. Lexicons of Hungarian history (including the grandiose so-called "ten-volume edition") do not say a word about it (according to its geographical index the name of Kamianets-Podilskyi is only mentioned once in the volume covering post-1918 history,²⁷ in connection with the futile effort of the Russian Red Army to advance westward to help the short-lived Hungarian Soviet government in 1919). Another work, a historical

24 ■ Massimo Arico: "Seht euch diesen Mann an." 3.

25 ■ István Bibó, "The Jewish Question in Hungary After 1944" in István Bibó, *Democracy, Revolution, Self-Determination: Selected Writings* (edited by Károly Nagy, translated by András Boros-Kazai) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

26 ■ Gellért Ádám – Gellért János: Menekülés a népirtás elől. Az 1941-es deportáltak hazatérési kísérletei és a Magyar állam ellenintézkedései. Betekintő, 2013/3 [Flight from Genocide. Attempts by the Deportees of 1941 to Return Home and the Countermeasures of the Hungarian State. An Overview]. <http://betekinto.hu/sites/default/files/2013_3_gellert_gellert.pdf>.

27 ■ Magyarország története 1918-1919, 1919-1945. (editor-in-chief.: György Ránki) Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1976.

chronology, deals extensively with the new antifascist policy line of the Communist Workers Party, which was decided at two meetings of its Central Committee on 28 June and 1 September, 1941, but there is no indication of anything having taken place between these two dates. The book makes no mention of the Kőrösmező deportation nor the Kamianets-Podilskyi massacre.²⁸ Even Majsai's aforementioned groundbreaking work of 1986 has remained largely sidelined. The John Wesley Theological College, where Tamás Majsai is a member of the faculty, organizes annual commemorations and field trips to the Ukraine, and on the 70th anniversary of the Kamianets-Podilskyi massacre in 2011 a conference was held on the subject and a memorial tablet was unveiled. These efforts notwithstanding, the victims of the first wave of the Hungarian Holocaust are largely forgotten. To this day there is no public monument in Hungary to the massacre that would resemble, for instance, the monument to the victims of the Katyn massacre by Soviet forces unveiled in Budapest in 2011.

Apart from high-level leaders, no one was held responsible for the mass murder, neither the German perpetrators who did the actual shooting nor the Hungarian officials who took an active part in organizing the deportations. In Germany there was a formal investigation between 1958 and 1962, but the prosecutors did not make any legal charges because of the principle of "Befehlsnotstand," which roughly translated means "emergency stemming from an order." At the time this constituted a legally exonerating explanation when someone in uniform was ordered to commit a crime by a superior.²⁹

In 1993 an investigation into the deportations and massacres of 1941 was launched by the Ministry of Justice in Hungary in response to a complaint made by Zoltán Szirtes. Szirtes, who strove to compel the state to acknowledge the role and responsibility of the Hungarian government and authorities in the atrocities, died one year before the final verdict of the investigation was delivered (the investigation took some five years). The verdict, which Szirtes would surely have seen as a victory, was unambiguous:

On the basis of the data of the investigation, with their resolutions and their acts the people who decided to have carried out and then implemented the deportation of Jews in the summer of 1941 forced the deportees, as members of the Jewry, into conditions beyond the Dnester River in which they were threatened with certain death.³⁰

28 ■ Magyar történelmi kronológia. Az őskortól 1970-ig [Hungarian Historical Chronology. From Ancient Times to 1970]. Tankönyvkiadó, Budapest, 1984, 526-527.

29 ■ Massimo Arico: "Seht euch..." 10-11.

30 ■ Zsuzsa Korn Horváth: "Adalékok a magyar holokauszt első szakaszának történetéhez és a Bárdossy-kormány felelősségéhez" [Data on the History of the First Phase of the Hungarian Holocaust and the Responsibility of the Bárdossy Government]. In *Élet és Irodalom* 2009. 3 February. Available also at: <<http://www.szombat.org/hirek-lapszemle/974-adalek-a-magyar-holokauszt-elso-szakaszanak-tortenetehez-es-a-bardossykormany-felelossegehez>>.

The investigation, however, led to no indictments. The last surviving individual determined on the basis of archival research to have born responsibility in the atrocities died in the course of the investigation.

The extensive and invaluable documentation of the investigation, which included archival research, testimonies, and expert opinions of historians, would have made an excellent collection of primary source materials for the study of this first tragedy of the Holocaust in Hungary. However, due to a lamentable procedural error, it was destroyed by the National Bureau Investigation in early 2009. As Ádám Gellért, a scholar on the subject, determined, although according to law the files should have been kept indefinitely since the investigation involved genocide, because of a mistake in classification they were accidentally disposed of after ten years, as records of investigations are in less serious cases.

While this blunder may constitute a lamentable loss to historians, the documents that were destroyed in fact may well have done little to answer an essential question regarding Kőrösmező. Little doubt remains, at this point, regarding the extent of the deportation or the subsequent massacre. What is difficult to understand about Kőrösmező is why it has not become part of common knowledge regarding the Holocaust in Hungary. How is it that one still hears repeated the contention that until March 1944 no deportations of Jews took place in Hungary? The Kőrösmező deportation was less systematically planned and less devastating in its extent than the deportations of 1944, but it was the first deportation of Jews from Hungarian territory and arguably the beginning of the Holocaust in Hungary. 🐼